

September 19, 2001

Maintain Strength and Unity in Tragic Aftermath

By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-187)

President Regan once said that “television has more power than any of us know.”

Television during the past few weeks has displayed its awesome power by bringing into our homes, schools and offices the tragedy of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that shook the United States and the world.

One thing is certain. The unprecedented peacetime attacks forever change the fabric of America. Thousands of innocent Americans slaughtered on American soil... Our very way of life threatened in a way we could have hardly imagined... Our resolve as a nation tested, perhaps, like never before.

In this fast-paced, electronically connected world of the 21st century, I believed Americans had been fully stripped of their innocence and naiveté. In the past century we had suffered, survived and triumphed over two world wars; been torn apart by an unpopular war which we could not win, as well as by internal racial strife from which we are still healing.

With our heritage in hard work, energy and drive, we have projected this great country into an unprecedented role as the leader of the free world. We have made huge strides in life-saving medicine and science; taken men to the moon and back, and made the world and all of its knowledge accessible to people everywhere through the Internet and a state-of-the art worldwide communications network.

As the country has flexed its muscles during this growth spurt, it's people have also grown, matured, become more sophisticated, perhaps more brazen, perhaps more jaded, certainly more driven – in other words, more worldly, less naïve, no longer as innocent and trusting as we once were.

But it appears we were wrong. The events of Sept. 11 have put all our previous successes – and failures – into better perspective. Last Tuesday was the day America truly lost its innocence and naiveté. That was the day we realized that the war of terrorism has no boundaries, has no rules.

I believe that when the final toll is known from the events of Sept. 11, nearly every one of us will in some way be personally affected. We will see a name of a friend, relative, a business acquaintance or, perhaps, a forgotten classmate or someone we knew casually on the list of those who perished in those cowardly acts. We have all lost someone or something.

We offer our heartfelt prayers for the victims, and for their families and friends. Life will never be the same for them.

As hard as it may be to admit, life may never be the same again for any of us. Many of us will be inconvenienced at workplaces, airports, schools and other public events.

Our collective and personal emotions since Sept. 11 have ranged from shock, disbelief, anger, hatred, fear and depression. We have grieved and sought revenge. It's been an incredibly stressful time for all Americans and there are still many difficult days ahead of us.

However, there are things we all can do that will help us deal with this stress. I offer these suggestions to help manage in these difficult times:

- Talk about your feelings and share your reaction, especially with children. Explain to them what happened, but let them know they are safe.
- Keep your life as normal as possible.
- Stay organized.
- Physical exercise, alternated with relaxation, will ease the physical reactions you might have.
- Don't turn to alcohol or drugs to numb the pain.
- Keep control of your life. Make everyday count.
- Be gentle to each other. Remember, we're all in this together.
- Finally, at times of national tragedy what we do in our everyday lives doesn't become less important, but other things become more important. Every disruption of our routines represents a victory for the terrorists.

Make no mistake, however, we will face serious emotional, physical and economic challenges in the weeks, months and years ahead as we undertake a war against evil.

I am confident that we will ultimately prevail in what will be a very different war – a war where winning will be difficult to define. Through the years ahead – as was the case in other times when our national resolve was tested – our unity will sustain us.

Those who perpetrated the astonishing destruction have already seen a united America begin to deal with this unprecedented catastrophe. There was a deluge of volunteers to the disaster locations, a surge of those willing to donate blood and open their pocketbooks for Red Cross and other disaster relief efforts.

In our darkest hours, America has always rallied around a common and profound purpose. Our purpose now is to support a war against the shadowy enemy of terrorism. We must suppress this enemy, not just for the well being of our nation, but also for the well being of the entire human race.

With freedom at stake, and with God on our side, America WILL triumph. In the days ahead, as in the past weeks, the world will see why our land is known as the home of the brave.

Remember the wise words of the English poet and philosopher John Donne:

“No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less, as well as if a promontory were, as well as if a manor of thy friends or of thine own were; any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.”

God Bless America.

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COLUMN FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 10, 2001

PA Museums Enhance Knowledge, Appreciation of Arts and Sciences

By Rep. Paul W. Semmel (R-187)

We in Pennsylvania are privileged to have within our borders several of the most prestigious and respected museums in the country. In fact, five of the nine institutions are located right here in southeastern Pennsylvania.

Among them are the Academy of Natural Sciences, the African American Museum, the Franklin Institute and University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archeology and Anthropology in Philadelphia, and the Mercer Museum in Doylestown.

Additionally, Pennsylvanians have bragging rights to both the Carnegie Museum of Natural History and the Carnegie Science Center in Pittsburgh, the Everhart Museum in Scranton and the Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts in Harrisburg.

All of these outstanding institutions are not only dedicated to the preservation of natural, historic and scientific artifacts, but are also highly involved in outreach and educational programs that bring the knowledge of science, technology and the arts to residents in all 67 Commonwealth counties.

In fact, last year more than 2.3 million people visited at least one of the nine museums, including approximately 1.7 million Pennsylvanians and 601,377 out-of-state tourists. So, in addition to providing great learning experiences, our museums are helping to build both the state and regional economies through tourism and visitor promotion.

Because the members of the General Assembly realize what an important resource our museums are and yet understand the financial pressures involved in their operations, we include money in the annual state budget to help.

Here's what we appropriated in the 2001-02 budget.

- Academy of Natural Sciences, \$560,000, including \$100,000 for outreach and education.
- African American Museum, \$351,000.
- Carnegie Museum of Natural History, \$248,000.
- Carnegie Science Center, \$248,000.

- Everhart Museum, \$45,000.
- Franklin Institute, \$750,000.
- Mercer Museum, \$191,000.
- University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, \$248,000
- Whitaker Center for Science and the Arts, \$137,000.

I heartily encourage area residents to take advantage of the wonderful learning experiences offered by these fine institutions. A visit to a museum makes for a great family outing. Many offer hands-on activities as well as displays and exhibits.

Here is a short description of the five museums in our region.

- The Academy of Natural Sciences is the oldest natural history museum of its kind in the Western Hemisphere. Its collection of 25 million plants, animals, fossils and minerals is one of the world's largest and most significant collections. In addition, the academy conducts environmental and biodiversity research on a global scale and is a national leader in informal science education through its school and outreach programs.
- The African American Museum, founded in 1976, was the first institution built by a major American city to house and interpret the life and work of African Americans. Its primary goal is to collect, preserve, interpret and present the lives and contributions of African Americans from Pennsylvania and the Delaware Valley. Additionally, the museum augments these exhibits with jazz concerts, gospel music, films, dance, fine art, and African and African-American artifacts.
- The Franklin Institute, founded in 1824, offers truly exciting science and technology exhibits and programs that fascinate youngsters and stimulate their natural curiosity in the sciences.
- The Mercer Museum in Doylestown is a recognized National Historic Landmark that houses one of the premier collections of early Americana in the country, including more than 50,000 artifacts representing more than 60 trades and crafts that predate the nation's industrial era.
- The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology features the collection, preservation and study of the world's people, past and present. Much of its worldwide research is presented in its 32 exhibition galleries and through the traveling exhibitions and outreach programs.

The other four museums across the state also have much to offer, so why not beat the heat this summer with a family trip to one of the nine air-conditioned museums? It will make for a fun family outing that will no doubt spark some interest in science, art and history.

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COLUMN FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 19, 2001

New Tax Break for PA College Savings Plan

By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-187)

Here's some great news for Pennsylvania parents who are struggling to save for their children's college educations. A little-noticed provision in the new federal tax bill signed into law by President Bush this spring gives a \$15 million tax break for families participating in TAP (Tuition Account Program) – Pennsylvania's college savings plan.

Under the federal law, TAP and similar programs in other states become tax free in January when used for qualified higher education expenses. State Treasurer Barbara Hafer – who's department administers the program – estimates that current TAP participants will save at least \$15 million and possibly \$20 million or more when they use their accounts.

With this new provision, TAP earnings will be free of federal tax, as well as state and local tax.

Until the law was revised, earnings on a TAP or similar plan account were taxable as income, at the student's rate, at the time the money was used to pay for college.

What's even better news for those parents who haven't started a TAP account is that the new tax break also applies to all new enrollees in either the guaranteed savings program or in the upcoming TAP Mellon/Dreyfus college investment program. This last program is currently being developed by the treasurer's office and is expected to begin accepting enrollments in the fall.

I do want to caution those approximately 4,000 current TAP participants who are scheduled to begin using money from their accounts to pay college bills this fall. They may want to consider delaying use of their TAP accounts until January when the new federal tax break kicks in.

So, what exactly is TAP, and why is it important, you may ask? In answer to that question, let's review the TAP program.

As I'm sure most everyone realizes, with the escalating cost of higher education – as demonstrated by recent headlines reporting tuition hikes at Penn State and the 14 state-owned universities – parents today face serious financial problems when it comes time to pay for their children's higher education.

That's where TAP can really come into play, as is evidenced by the fact that TAP continues to grow, surpassing the 60,000-account milestone.

Whether your child is in nursery school or just a few short years from high school graduation, now is the time to start saving for their college education through the expanded TAP plan.

The program allows you to save for tomorrow's education at today's lower prices by purchasing tuition credits. To enroll in TAP, you must be at least 18 years of age and either you or the person for whom you are opening the account must live in Pennsylvania at the time you open the account. The enrollment fee is \$50, and there are no annual fees or brokerage commissions.

Parents who open an account for their newborns within six months of the birth date can enroll for free, as long as they make a minimum deposit of \$25 toward TAP credits.

These credits can be used at any accredited college or vocational school, public or private, anywhere in the nation. It offers families the option to purchase all or part of their child's college tuition before he or she graduates from high school.

As TAP enrollment continues to grow, the General Assembly has made the program even better by passing the TAP Enhancement Act. Under this new law, parents may now use TAP savings on room and board and other school-related expenses in addition to tuition.

Families may also choose to enroll in a mutual-fund style investment program rather than the traditional savings plan. Even community groups and business organizations may open TAP accounts from which they can award scholarships.

It's an excellent program that can ease the pressure of financing your children's education, and I encourage parents, grandparents and other family members to look into starting a TAP account.

For additional information, call the TAP toll-free number, **1-800-440-4000, Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.**, or visit the TAP Web site at www.patap.org.

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COLUMN FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 31, 2001

**Kids Know Their Priorities –
Develop Some Great Ideas for New Laws**

By Rep. Paul Semmel (R-187)

If students carried mesh backpacks to school, it would be more difficult to hide possible weapons or drugs. That's an idea that a fourth-grade student from Kernsville Elementary School developed for my "There Ought to be a Law" contest.

Jared Creamer earned first place for the suggestion that Pennsylvania enact a law requiring all students to carry mesh backpacks, rather than ones made of canvas, nylon or leather. The youngster said this would discourage kids from trying to sneak harmful or dangerous items into the school without adult knowledge.

Every year I hold this contest as a way to help our young people learn more about civics and government. It's important to get kids thinking about laws and why they're important.

Fourth-grader Ryan Poticher from Rockland Elementary placed second with his idea to require seat belts in all school buses. Third place went to Abbey Weidner of Kernsville Elementary who said the General Assembly should outlaw smoking in all public buildings.

Because I don't know anyone who doesn't relish the occasional cookie – especially with a tall glass of milk – I enjoyed Erin Fedirko's proposal to establish a State Cookie. I'm sure many of my colleagues in the House would quickly volunteer to serve on the "Tasting Committee." But, they'd have to fight me for the chairmanship! Erin is also a Kernsville Elementary fourth-grade student, and won fourth place with this idea.

The fifth place winner was Mark Baskin, another Kernsville student. He wants the Legislature to create a special designation of "State School District," which would be rotated between the 501 school districts every leap year. That way a district could hold the title for four years, but all districts would have a shot at wearing the crown.

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Fourth-grade students from both public and private schools throughout the 187th Legislative District were eligible to enter the contest. Approximately 130 submitted entries, which were judged by Kathryn Moyer, Gerald Faust and myself.

I was pleased so many students and their teachers took an interest in this competition. All five winners, as well as participants, received congratulatory House of Representatives Certificates. I always look forward to hearing from the students because their ideas often have merit. I'm now further studying this year's winning proposals to see if it's feasible to draft any of them into legislation. We'll just have to see what happens next.

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COLUMN FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 2, 2001

**Women's History Month A Good Time
To Recall Women Who Served**
By Rep. Paul W. Semmel (R-187)

As with all recorded history, some stories arrive at our doorsteps lacking complete confirmation – some details unverifiable, some names forever among the unknown. So it is with military stories, and sadly, especially when it comes to accurate recorded accounts of the millions of brave women who served their country.

As chairman of the House Veterans Affairs and Emergency Preparedness Committee, I am happy to report that a great deal of effort has been done and continues on the valiant task of filling those missing chapters in our nation's military history. This month, Women's History Month, and every month of the year, it is imperative that we continue to gather and archive the many valiant contributions women made in defending our shores and the freedoms we enjoy.

Did you know that there are nearly two million women veterans? Did you know that women have served in every conflict from the American Revolution to Panama, Bosnia, Kosovo, and more?

Although historians generally agree that Molly Pitcher of the American Revolution is a legendary figure, they believe the story is probably based on a Pennsylvania woman named Mary Ludwig Hays McCauley. Reportedly, McCauley, who lived in Carlisle (Cumberland County), took the place of her husband who had been injured or killed during the war. Whatever the details, this much we know. McCauley was awarded a pension from the Commonwealth "for services rendered during the war" in an amount more than the usual widow's pension awarded to soldiers' wives.

More than one account exists about women who disguised themselves as men to serve in the American Revolutionary War.

Some historical records indicate that over 60 women were wounded or killed in the Civil War. Several hundred lost their lives in World War I, and more than 400 were killed during World War II. Just how many women served in each conflict remains unconfirmed, especially in the Revolutionary and Civil wars when female service was illegal.

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Estimates for later conflicts show that about 33,000 women served in WWI, nearly 500,000 in WWII, and about 120,000 in the Korean era.

One group of women in particular have only recently received the honor and recognition they deserve. During World War II, these women became heroes, pioneers and role models as the first women in the history of the country trained to fly military craft. Thirty-eight members of the Women Airforce Service Pilots, WASPs, died in the line of duty, their life-and-blood sacrifices not recognized until 1977 when each was awarded the Victory Medal.

A project is under way now titled "Wings Across America" to create a virtual museum to preserve this critical chapter of WWII history. Many surviving female pilots, all over 75 years of age, are sharing their personal accounts in support of the project.

No official accurate records exist about the number of women who served in Vietnam. Through the work of the Vietnam Women's Memorial Project, however, it is estimated that about 11,000 American military women were stationed in Vietnam. The guerilla tactics and jungle-like topography rendered "safe behind our lines" a non-existent condition. Women in Vietnam sloshed through the same mud and blood as the men, witnessed the same wartime horrors, and suffered the same inhumane treatment.

Eight were killed, each of their lives remembered by eight trees planted around the plaza of the Vietnam Women's Memorial, authorized by Congress in 1988 and dedicated in 1993.

Among the eight women killed was Dunmore, Pennsylvania native 2nd Lt. Carol Ann Elizabeth Drazba, who was killed in a helicopter crash near Saigon.

Casualties from Desert Storm included two Pennsylvania women: Specialist Christine Mayes, 22, of Rochester Mills, and Specialist Beverly Clark, 23, of Armagh.

Let us not forget, either, that young women sailors were among those killed on the USS Cole last October.

From the American Revolution to today's peacekeeping missions, women were there. Therefore, throughout Women's History month and always, I encourage all of us to remember that women have served proudly since our nation began.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 7, 2001

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**Semmel Praises Education, BioTech Greenhouse Initiatives
Contained In Governor's Proposed 2001-02 Budget**

HARRISBURG – Unprecedented investments in the education of Pennsylvania's children and the health of all Commonwealth citizens struck a chord with Rep. Paul W. Semmel (R-187) as he listened to the Governor's proposed 2001-02 budget address this week.

"Despite signs of a softening economy, we continue to cut taxes for hard-working families and job-creating businesses," said Semmel. "Equally important and as has been true of budgets past, this proposal is not simply about numbers. It's about people and making a positive difference in their lives.

"The millions of children attending the Commonwealth's 501 school districts will reap the benefits of dramatic new investments in public education, and Pennsylvanians of all ages will realize health benefits through an innovative call for life-saving research 'bio-tech greenhouses.'"

The Lehigh and Berks counties lawmaker praised the Governor's call for the highest public education funding increases in 10 years. In total, Pennsylvania public schools would receive \$6.4 billion under the plan unveiled today. This includes \$4 billion in basic-education funding, a 4 percent increase; and \$861.4 million for special education, a full 10 percent increase.

In the last six years, Semmel noted, inflation has gone up 19.3 percent. In contrast, state support of public schools has gone up by 32.5 percent.

"Moreover, the funds are distributed in a manner that ensures poorer school districts receive extra help," said Semmel. "Special education adjustments also have been made based on the actual number of special-needs students within any given district."

Nearly \$17.2 million of the total \$861.4 million proposed for special education funding would go to school districts experiencing extraordinary special-education costs, Semmel said.

All school districts would be guaranteed a minimum basic funding increase of 2 percent and a minimum special-education funding increase of 5 percent.

Making a difference in the life of Pennsylvanians also is at the heart of a proposed \$90 million initiative to create three "biotech greenhouses," one each in Pittsburgh, in Philadelphia, and in Harrisburg.

“The goal here,” Semmel said, “is to duplicate the same success realized with the Pittsburgh Digital Greenhouse launched in 1999 and making southwestern Pennsylvania a key player in the competitive computer-chip design industry.

“The proposed biotech greenhouses would seek to do the same, but in the area of research into life-saving cures for diseases and illnesses.”

Pennsylvania is already a leader in the life-sciences sector, serving as home to some of the world’s most prestigious research institutions and biotech companies.

Ground-breaking research presently under way in Pennsylvania focuses on treatment for Parkinson’s disease, a devastating illness impairing the body-movement capabilities of more than 500,000 Americans.

“Establishing biotech greenhouses would help ensure that important research such as this continues.

“People, not numbers, that is what this budget is all about,” said Semmel. “It is a budget that clearly demonstrates a state dedicated to making a difference in its citizens’ lives.”

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